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**Lessons from Flanders: drivers & pitfalls of cooperation on a  
business park**

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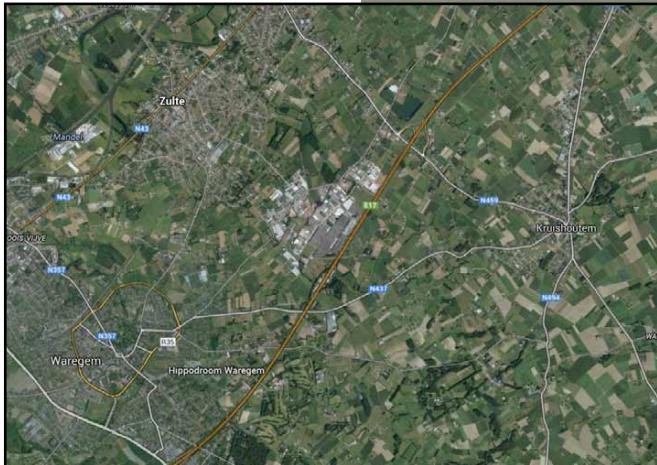
## Quick-scan

Lessons learned from  
De Zaubeek:

Sustainability cooperation remains a complex matter. Different actors with different powers and different interests can generate barriers for implementation.

Sustainability cooperation must go beyond the business park boundaries. Interaction with local communities and municipalities is really important.

Free-riders are a problem for sustainability cooperation to succeed. Cooperation needs to be organised. All the beneficiaries have to contribute financially to this organisation.



View of De Zaubeek and the three neighbouring municipalities

# DRIVERS & PITFALLS OF SUSTAINABILITY COOPERATION ON A BUSINESS PARK *A lesson from Flanders*



***For almost ten years several companies located in De Zaubeek Business Park in Flanders have been collaborating with the goal of creating a more sustainable industrial zone. Many initiatives have been developed in this business park, many successful, but some clearly pointed to constraints that require action beyond the reach of the companies or the business association. The former chairman of the association has been involved in several of these initiatives and we asked him to tell his story.***

#### **Cooperation towards sustainability: a (former) park manager perspective in Flanders**

Inter-firm cooperation can help achieve economic, environmental and societal benefits. In other words, it can be the mechanism that ensures the successful development of sustainable business parks. But cooperation when not organised can lead to problems and barriers. Last December we met Jan Lippens, former chairman of De Zaubeek Business Association, asking about his experience in sustainability cooperation in the business park environment.

De Zaubeek is a business park located between the municipalities of Zulte and Kruishoutem in East Flanders. With some 2500 employees and 95 companies, this business park is one of the biggest industrial zones in East Flanders. With the aim of creating a clean, safe and green business park, companies in this industrial zone have been collaborating on different sustainability initiatives. ‘My dream is to have a very green and pleasant zone, with grass, trees and a few little details which make you happy when coming to work’, Jan Lippens said.

#### **Renewable energy production: drivers & pitfalls**

Implementing green energy measures is the main goal of the inter-firm cooperation in De Zaubeek business park. With this aim a formal cooperative the Zaubeek Power cvba has been established. Having the ambition of economic profit the cvba has been an important driver for the inter-firm cooperation; ‘You can gain interest from companies only when they earn money’, Jan Lippens said. The wind cooperative has been financially supported by several companies in the zone. A preliminary study, in 2008, investigated the feasibility of building five windmills in the business park. Conditions on wind speed were positive, but implementation was not possible according to restrictions in place under the Belgian military radar regulation.



The ambition of implementing this project has been very high; the business association asked the government to modify the military regulation, but this seems not to be feasible. In the last one and a half year the legal constraint has become a driver for technological investigations. Alternative solutions have been explored; contacts have been made with a US-based company producing vertical axes wind turbines, and a collaboration with Ghent University and a metal industry company has been developed in order to create a brand new vertical axis wind turbine. If these projects are going to succeed and the new wind turbines are going to be compatible with the military regulation in the next years we are going to see some windmills on the business park.

#### **Sustainable mobility: drivers & pitfalls**

Sustainable mobility is another important area of cooperation in De Zaubeek. Bikes and public transport are highly supported by the companies located in the zone.

It can be said that, in the municipalities of Zulte and Kruishoutem, there is almost no unemployment. When hiring new employees, it is often the case that companies have to recruit people from further away, outside the neighbouring areas of the park. This is especially important for young people, as also Jan Lippens said ‘They are highly dependent on public transport, they are not investing so much in cars’. Public transport accessibility is a crucial element to succeed in attracting

new businesses to the zone. One of the ambitions of the business association is to connect the business park to the public transport system by having a bus stop in the zone. But this project has been not implemented. Maybe in the future, with the business park expansion and more workers coming to the business park, it will be more interesting for De Lijn, the company managing the public bus transport in Flanders, to bring a bus to the zone.

‘It is really important today having houses close to business parks so people can come to work by bike’, Jan Lippens said. Cycling is becoming relevant for several business parks in Flanders and different municipalities, such as Deinze and Veurne, which have been promoting the use of bikes by making the bike paths to the industrial zones safer. Mobility is a cross-border issue, it is a complex problem, but with the right cooperation solutions can be achieved. Cooperation among the municipalities of Zulte, Waregem and Kruishoutem and De Zaubeek has been developed and a plan to connect a cycling network to the three villages and the business park is going to be implemented in 2015.

#### **Making the cooperation more efficient.**

##### **Communication as a driver**

Finding common ground around the sustainability agenda is complicated because the expectations and wishes of the different players must be managed. Players include businesses located within the industrial zone, local municipalities, communities and governments. Interaction among these actors is fundamental to achieve social benefits through inter-firm cooperation.

‘It is really important that there is a very good interaction between the local government and the industrial zone’ Jan Lippens said. In Flanders the most common business organization form is the not-for-profit organization (in Flemish vzw). By promoting communication and information sharing, these organisations help the business parks in gaining respect and acceptance from local communities. Organisations of this type have been established in several business parks in Flanders (van Zwam et al, 2008), such as De Prijkels in Nazareth or Gentbrugge II.



De Zaubeek vzw website homepage



*De Zaubeek business park, view from the E17*

Next to the power cooperative, De Zaubeek vzw was created. The business association is responsible for all the communication between the local authorities and the business park. Since this association exists the interactions have greatly improved, leading to a better cooperation and coordination of the different players.

A few years ago, the vzw started organising the waste collection for companies located in the business park. Thanks to the wider communication with the local communities now this initiative is growing with the aim of extending the service to all companies located within the two neighbouring municipalities. Another initiative taken by the association has been that of investing some money in planting trees in a public space as green belt between the zone and the housing areas.

The social perspective of sustainable cooperation in business parks, represented by the interaction and communication among and with employees, local environment and business partners, is an essential factor to ensure all different players are well engaged in cooperation initiatives.

#### **Free-riders are still a problem: cooperation needs organisation**

In De Zaubeek a common security system has been implemented, but only a few companies have been paying for it, the presence of free-riders remains a problem.

Moreover, at this business park the inter-firm co-operation is organised by two different entities that are not always reinforcing each other: De Zaubeek vzw, a nonprofit organisation, and the Zaubeek Power cvba, with a profit making purpose. To join both associations, however, a company must pay an annual fee that is mainly used to cover management costs. The main problem is that neither the vzw nor the cvba can force companies to pay, while their activities benefit to all - regardless if they pay the fee or not. This is the well-known free-riders problem, but there are ways to solve this. Business park management is a bottom-up, industry led, company driven process; but a clear management structure is needed to formalise agreements, split costs according to services, offer generic solutions with park-wide financial contributions and optional facilities on an individual or cluster base. This system is in force at many business parks but is custom-made for every business association.

The principles of such management structure are described in the book series 'Duurzame Bedrijventerreinen, juridisch, economisch, ruimtelijk en technisch bekeken.' (Van Eetvelde et al. 2005).